

# Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict

## Pathways toward terrorism and genocide

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rdac20>

## Drivers of violent extremism in higher education institutions of Pakistan

Zahid Shahab Ahmed & Qamar Abbas Jafri

To cite this article: Zahid Shahab Ahmed & Qamar Abbas Jafri (2020) Drivers of violent extremism in higher education institutions of Pakistan, Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict, 13:3, 230-244, DOI: [10.1080/17467586.2020.1821068](https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2020.1821068)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2020.1821068>



Published online: 17 Sep 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 205



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# Drivers of violent extremism in higher education institutions of Pakistan

Zahid Shahab Ahmed  and Qamar Abbas Jafri 

Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University, Burwood, Australia; School of Global Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

## ABSTRACT

Since 2004, madrassas (Islamic seminaries) of Pakistan have been the primary focus of peace education interventions in Pakistan. The incidents of violence involving university students are a historic phenomenon in Pakistan, but the tendencies of violent clashes on university campuses and recruitment of university student in violent extremism are increasing. Despite an increasing number of violent clashes on university campuses and recruitment of university students by Islamists for jihad (holy war), there is negligible literature on university students' radicalization in Pakistan. This study provides empirical data based on a comparative analysis of students' perception from two public sector universities of Pakistan, namely the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) and the Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU). The findings suggest different dynamics of hate speech, availability of extremist material and extremist recruitment between the two universities. While the QAU campus is dominated by politically motivated ethnic groups, the IIUI students are exposed to religiously motivated contents, violence, and recruitment. As it is reported in this study, the differences between the two universities are also because most of the IIUI students have religious inclinations because of their madrasa backgrounds and also because of the dominance of groups like the Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba Pakistan.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 September 2019  
Accepted 3 August 2020

## KEYWORDS

Violent extremism;  
universities; students;  
Pakistan; education

## Introduction

Since the start of the “War on Terror” in 2001 and Pakistan’s alliance with the US in this war, a plethora of scientific literature on causes of extremism and violence in Pakistan has focused on *madrassas* (Islamic seminaries) as one of the important sources of violent extremism in Pakistan and beyond. This overwhelming focus of research on madrassas led to the countering violent extremism (CVE) projects focusing on madrasa reforms – mainly foreign-funded. There are many examples of foreign-funded madrasa education programmes, such as the ones implemented by the International Centre for Religion and Diplomacy, and the United States Institute of Peace (Ahmed, 2017). However, such measures have been ignoring the drivers of violent extremism (VE) in modern educational institutions, such as universities. This is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by VE. Throughout this paper, the term VE is used to refer to “the beliefs and actions of

people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious, or political views. Violent extremist views can be exhibited along a range of issues, including politics, religion, and gender relations”.<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous recent examples that not just point to violent tendencies in higher education institutions (HEIs) of Pakistan but also to violent extremism beyond educational institutions. Among the prominent cases is the episode involving killing of a student, Mashal Khan, at Bacha Khan University in Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in 2017 where an angry mob consisting of mainly university students (although some non-academic staff members of the university were involved to instigate the students) suspected Khan of posting blasphemous contents on Facebook (Ahmed, 2019). The violent extremism beyond university campuses in Pakistan, involving university graduates, includes the example of Saad Aziz, a graduate of an elite university Institute of Business Administration in Karachi who was running an Al-Qaeda sleeper cell in the city along with some other, and had been found in targeted killing of members of religious minorities and low-rank security officials (Sahoutara, 2019). Based on the severity of this emerging challenge of VE among university students and graduates, the government authorities in Pakistan have already been discussing to redirect the focus of their preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) activities towards the HEIs. For example, the National Counter Terrorism Authority of Pakistan has reached an agreement with the country's Higher Education Commission to implement a range of measures, including a university-level teaching course on PVE (Higher Education Commission Pakistan [HECP], 2017).

Despite an increasing number of recruitments of university students by Islamists for *jihad* (holy war), and clashes between student groups on university campuses, there is insufficient empirical research on the exposure of university students to the literature on radical ideology in Pakistan. This research paper endeavours to provide empirical information on university students and graduates exposure to hate speech and ideology in addition to the inter-ethnic group dynamics that act as push factors for young students to engage in violence – mainly religiously and ethnically motivated.

Before discussing the possible drivers of violent extremism in youth, explaining the link between extremism and violent extremism is important. Existing research recognizes the role of right-wing individuals or groups who are moderate in their views about peace values such as respect, rights and tolerance but their underlying actions encourage their followers to be violent or aggressive towards their ideological opponents (Schmid, 2014). For example, in Pakistan, Jamaat-e-Islami is a far-right political party that denounces the use of violence in political speeches but in practice, it was involved in radicalization<sup>2</sup> and recruitment of university students for *jihad* in Afghanistan during the 1980s (Ahmed, 2012). Tablighi Jamaat or “the Society for Spreading (Deobandi Islamic teachings) faith” is another India–Pakistan-based Deobandi missionary group whose front-line leaders claim as being peaceful in their ideology and actions, but over the past decades, there has been a significant increase in the involvement of its members, mainly university graduates (e.g., Saad Aziz) in religiously motivated violence (Zahid, 2017).

A considerable amount of literature has been published on drivers of violent extremism in university students. These drivers are grouped into push and pull factors. A more recent study identifies marginalization, inequality, discrimination, and human rights violation as the major push factors for university students towards violent extremism (Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar, & Barton, 2018). This interpretation differs from (Zeiger et al., 2015)

who argue that the existence of organized extremist groups with violent discourses and programmes that provide welfare services and employment in exchange might be the pull factors for educated students. In contrast to the above findings, however, Githens-Mazer, 2009 found that historical rivalry between Muslims and the Christian West which is also linked to the colonization of Muslim territories by European powers. Similarly, Zhirkov, Verkuyten, and Weesie (2014) found that perceived threats of Western political and economic domination in Muslim countries might push educated youth to join the struggle (e.g., jihad) against the West and their allied Muslim rulers in Muslim countries. A most recent reinforcement of this perception is the US-led war on terror involving US and NATO troops in Afghanistan has increased the sense of frustration among Muslim youth (McCauley, 2012).

Contrary to the above arguments, other studies suggest that push factors for VE include the lack of access to educational, health, and welfare facilities (e.g., roads, transport, gas, electricity, and water supply) might create a sense of relative deprivation among youth against the more privileged groups of a society (Orsini, 2013; Pisoiu, 2015). For instance, a research involving university students in Kenya found that educated youth develops grievances against ruling leaders who are corrupt (Botha, 2014). Studies in Pakistan have found that poverty, poor governance, unstable political system, poor education system, and unemployment trigger violent extremism in youth (Noor, 2009; Winthrop & Graff, 2010; Yusuf, 2016). A study on education and militancy in Pakistan found that educational attainment does not have a correlation with violence (Winthrop & Graff, 2010). This study has however not focused on the prevalence of violent extremism in Pakistan's universities. In terms of the organization of this paper, it begins with an overview of the incidents of violence and extremism in Pakistani universities. This follows sections on methodology, and results and discussion.

## **Violence and extremism in Pakistani universities**

There are certain national dynamics that also play a role in violence and violent extremism involving university students. Among those factors are ethnic rivalries and religious extremism.

There is also the ethnic dimension that is responsible for regular student clashes in Pakistani universities. There are historic ethnic rivalries in Pakistan and often the state has found it difficult to deal with such cleavages to reach consensus on some infrastructural projects, such as the *Kalabagh* Dam project. While the ethnic differences between the East and West Pakistan led to Pakistan's disintegration in 1971, there still exist ethnic rivalries mainly in the form of minority ethnic groups questioning the Punjabi's dominance at the national level. The dominance of the Punjabis in Pakistan is natural because they are around 50% of the total population in the country and by virtue of that hold most seats in the upper and lower houses of the parliament, and more jobs in civil and military institutions (Kennedy, 2003, p. 158). This has led to grievances among other ethnic groups against Punjabis and the rise of ethno-nationalism particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Balochistan.

There are more than 170 HEIs in Pakistan and around 100 are public (government-funded) HEIs (Khattak, 2016). The public sector HEIs have students from all over Pakistan where students belonging to various ethnic, religious, and political groups of Pakistan come to study. Officially, political activities of students on university campuses are not

allowed but student unions and groups still exist. The political parties of Pakistan maintain student groups at campuses across the country to show their presence among the educated youth of Pakistan. Students in public universities have a membership of multiple political and religious student unions which might reinforce their group identity.

The presence of student political groups in the HEIs attempt to have influence in administrative and teaching matters, such as admissions, grades, hostel allotment, and fee concessions. For example, the University of Engineering and Technology Lahore is a hub of Jamat-ud-Dawa<sup>3</sup> activities, and the Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT) has great influence in one of the oldest universities of Pakistan, the University of Punjab, Lahore (Abdullah & Saeed, 2016). The presence of far-right and far-left (ethno-nationalist) student groups in universities may lead to power competition among student groups and could cause clashes (most of the time violent) among these groups, such as the fights between IJT and Pashtun Students Federation, People's Student Federation, and the Muslim Student Federation.

In recent years, the violent clashes among student groups in public sector universities particularly QAU and IIUI have increased significantly. The IJT attempts to enforce a particular far-right political ideology on campus and mostly dislike the nationalist and secular student groups on campus such as in QAU (Rehman, 2018). For instance, in 2017, the IJT members ransacked the cultural event (music, and dance) of ethnic Pashtun and Baluch students in the University of Punjab Lahore (Hasnain, 2017). QAU is Pakistan's top-ranked public university which attracts students from across the country due to its quota-based admissions. The quota policy aims to remove educational disparities between developed and underdeveloped regions of Pakistan. Quota system also is a part of nation-building process in Pakistan (Alavi, 1991). The quota system gathers the diversity to reinforce unity, faith, and discipline as the ideals of the founder of Pakistan Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah whose title has been given to the QAU (Ahmed & Balasubramanian, 2010). Furthermore, the involvement of university students in high profile violent attacks, such as the cases of Tashfeen Malik and Saad Aziz. Tashfeen Malik, a graduate from a public sector university in South Punjab, was one of the perpetrators of an ideologically motivated attack on 2 December 2015 at the Inland Regional Centre California in which more than a dozen people were killed (Ahmed, 2015). Another case is of Saad Aziz, a graduate of the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi. He got inspiration for violence from the Daesh propaganda and perpetrated violent attacks of sectarian nature mainly in Karachi city (Zahid, 2015). Later it emerged as an Islamist group (a subsidiary of the IJT) at the university, exposed Aziz to the teachings of Syed Qutb, and radicalized him to use violence for an ideological reason.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, a group of university students was radicalized by Islamists in a public university in Islamabad and this group perpetrated several violent attacks in the city (Zahid, 2017). These are, but a few examples, of the educated youth from HEIs of Pakistan who were involved in VE.

## Methodology

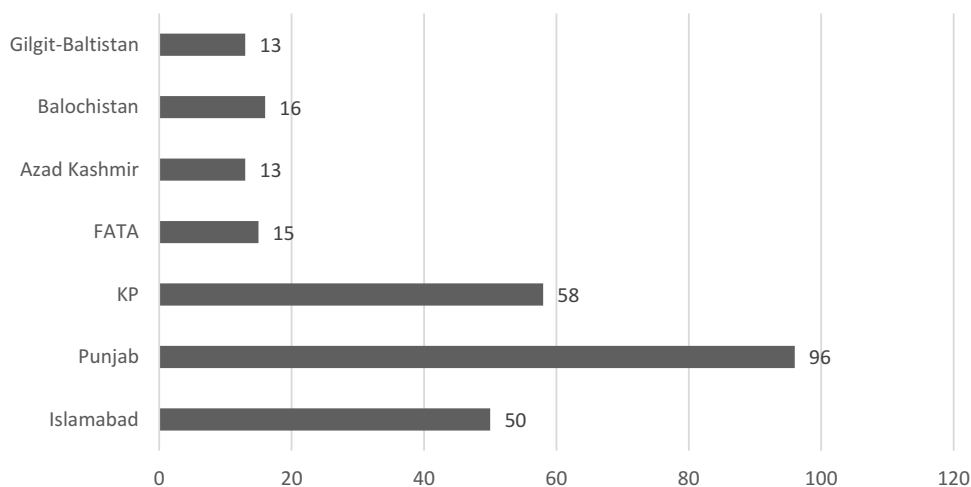
In this research, the survey was administered to the current students and graduates of two public sector universities of Islamabad city QAU and International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI). These universities were selected as a study population because there have been several incidents of intergroup student clashes in both the universities. Often

such clashes lead to the university shut down from several days to months, such as the closures of IIUI campus in 2011 and QAU in 2017 (Basharat, 2018; Haq, 2017). The participants included current students and recent graduates of the two selected universities. The recent graduates were the ones who had graduated from the universities within five years before the data collection phase, meaning during 2013–2018. The sample includes participants from across Pakistan who were studying in the two selected universities (see Figure 1). The sample included 144 men and 127 women participants.

For data collection, we approached the participants through our existing links in the selected universities. Through initial snowballing, we prepared a list of potential participants and sent them email invitations to seek their consent for participation in this research. The ones who had agreed to participate were emailed survey links. The survey was distributed through Qualtrics online link. The data were collected during September 2017 and March 2018. In total, we received 271 responses that included 169 respondents from QAU and 102 from IIUI. Those participants whose responses to a few questions are missing are reported in data analysis as a “missing value.” There were two sub-scales that were included in the survey to measure the extent of extremism: in-group behaviour and out-group behaviour. The variables were measured by five-point Likert scale, i.e., strongly agree (1) somewhat agree (2), neutral (3), somewhat disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5). The presence of violence in a society gives researchers a conceptually clear base to know the basic measure of violence and safety in its diverse forms. Therefore, it is important for the conceptual framework to include the in-group and out-group behaviour measurement with reference to extremism.

## Key findings and discussion

This section of the research paper discusses the relevant findings that are followed by analysis of the findings in light of the research questions. The data is presented in tabular form whereby relevant statistics are visualized in frequency and percentage. The results are followed by the analysis of different factors such as exposure to violence and trend of



**Figure 1.** Participants' ethnic/regional background in Pakistan.

violence in recent years on campus that may indicate increasing pattern of violent extremism in youth, especially the university students and graduates in Pakistan.

### ***Exposure to violence and radicalization***

The first component of the research focused on the participants' exposure to violent clashes involving university students on university campuses, and hostels. In this regard, the participants were asked a range of questions. A majority (59%) of them reported having witnessed violent clashes involving students from their university. The ones who agreed to having seen violent clashes were further asked about the location of those incidents.

Most of the participants (55%) reported having seen such incidents on their university campuses with the rest (40%) witnessing that in student hostels. Few participants (5%) reported having seen such violent clashes beyond university premises. Then, we further investigated when those incidents were most recently observed. According to the responses, most of the respondents (29.31%) witnessed those incidents during 2017 (see [Figure 2](#)).

In terms of exposure to hate speech, the participants were asked about some specific aspects, such as the availability of extremist and/or hate material on campuses (see [Figure 3](#)). The hate material in context of this study includes the published pamphlets, speeches, and racial insults that intend to promote jihad or armed struggle to bring Islamic system (by Islamists) and political rights (by ethnic students). In response, almost one-fifth of the participants said that they have seen such material is available in their university. It is interesting to highlight that most of the IIUI participants (35.71%) agreed to having seen extremist material in their university's premises. This could be because of the different nature of both universities, QAU is dominated by politically motivated ethnic groups and the IIUI by religious groups. The dominant student group in IIUI is IJT. This could be because the university is home to most students who come to study Islamic Studies with different specializations, such as Arabic, Islamic Studies, and Sharia and Law (Islamic Jurisprudence). Most of the students already have established right-wing leaning behaviours. IJT has multipronged support ranging from university administrations, academics, donors (mainly Saudi Arabia), and some state institutions including intelligence agencies (Haider, 2013).

A strong relationship between nationalism and violent extremism in Pakistan has been reported in the literature due to forced patriotism on student groups representing different ethnic groups from far-right radical groups (Hoodbhoy, 2007). For example, a newspaper article reported some students in the QAU named the Taliban leaders as their favourite personality such as Nek Muhammad<sup>5</sup> (Dawn, 2016). Other ethnicity-based student groups (Baloch, Pashtun, Sindhi, and Saraiki) are not large in terms of their sizes to confront the IJT in IIUI. IJT is one of the oldest student groups in Pakistan, founded in 1947, and has become more organized over the past seven decades. The group also has a legacy of cooperation with the state, for example, the group had worked alongside Pakistan army to counter insurgency in former East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh). IJT organized two paramilitary units, al-Badr and al-Shams, to fight Bengali guerrillas (Nasr, 1994, p. 66). Of recent, networks of IJT students are more dangerous than ethnic student groups. Most of the IJT students have been found in high profile terrorist activities across

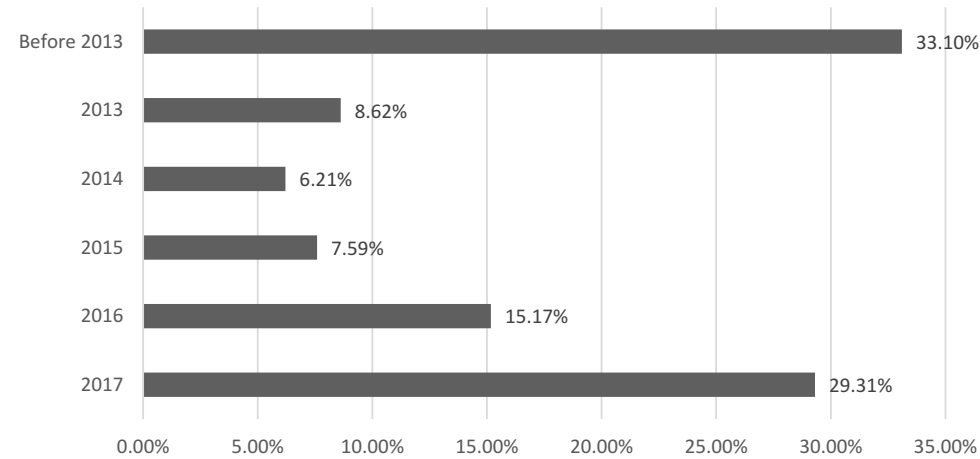


Figure 2. The year of the last violent clash witnessed by the participants.

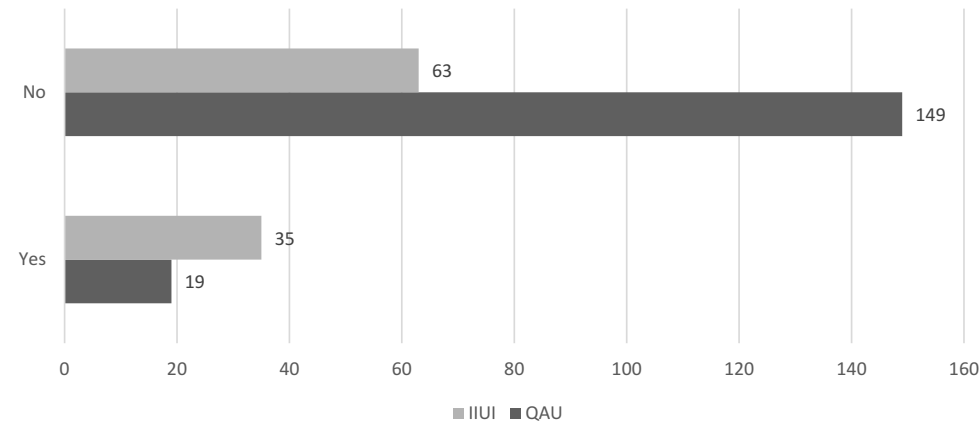


Figure 3. I often find hate material on-campus spreading hatred and extremism.

the country. The IJT affiliated students of IIUI established sleeper cell of Al-Qaeda in Islamabad which was involved in the target killings of a Christian minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti (Zahid, 2014).

Table 1 shows the exposure of the respondents to recruitment by militant organizations. According to the data under discussion, the participants have been exposed to militants and their networks in the university. Even if they are exposed in small number (around 6%), the chances of their radicalization may have higher. We argue that the IIUI students are more prone than the QAU students to militant recruitment and this could be because the two institutions have different dynamics, for example, most of the IIUI students from the strict religious family background with earlier education in madrassas. For instance, the Faculties of Shariah and Law, Arabic, and Usuluddin (Principles of Islam) have thousands of male and female students from madrassa backgrounds.



**Table 1.** I know a student of my university who joined a militant organization.

Response	IIUI	QAU	Frequency	%
Yes	11	4	15	5.66
No	141	109	250	94.34
Total	125	113	265	100

Missing value: 6 (p-value 0.02).

### *The drivers of violent extremism in universities*

In this section of the study, the research participants were asked a few questions to seek their views about the possible drivers of violent extremism in Pakistan. The responses are divided based on the gender of the participants. The difference of opinion was seen between the male and female participants. While male participants perceive poor governance (30%), most female participants claim lawlessness (30%) as the main cause of violent extremism in Pakistan. Corruption was the third main factor (12%) which could lead to violent extremism in university students and it is associated with the mode of government (see Table 2). These findings are new compared to earlier studies in Pakistan, such as Noor (2009) observed that students from rural background (regional areas) in Pakistan are more inclined to violent extremism compared to students from urban areas while Siddiqua (2011) argued that students from urban background are more involved in violence due to ideological motivation and grievances against the poor system of governance of Pakistan.

Table 3 elaborates the perception of university students about sectarian/religious causes of violence on the campuses of their universities. The data in table under discussion indicate that majority of QAU students disagreed (around 30% of 144) with this statement while most of the IIUI students agreed (about 26% of 116). There are two main reasons to argue about this response. One, QAU is a liberal but ethnically diverse university where ethno-lingual membership is stronger than religious/sectarian affiliation. QAU does not witness sectarian violence but faces ethnic clashes. A possible explanation for this might be that Deobandi and Salafi student groups (e.g., IJT) who have more influence in IIUI and most of them support, openly or tacitly, violent sectarian groups in Pakistan. Such student groups in the IIUI may have networks with sectarian militants (e.g., Lashkar-i-Jhangvi) who have been involved in mass atrocities of minority sects, such as Shi'ite (Zahid, 2014).

Table 4 explains the perception of the respondents about the possible causes of student clashes in university. Bulk of the students of both the universities agreed (strongly

**Table 2.** Perception of the respondents about the causes of violent extremism in Pakistani universities.

Response	Male	Female	Frequency	%
Poor governance	50	30	80	30
Poverty	12	16	28	10
Corruption	15	21	36	12
Lawlessness	33	43	76	30
Interference of outside powers	14	14	28	10
Any other (education system, ideology)	18	4	22	8
<b>Total</b>	142	128	270	100

Missing value: 1 (p-value 0.01).

**Table 3.** I think clashes among university students are a result of sectarian differences.

Response	IIUI	QAU	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	9	9	18	6.92
Agree	22	21	43	16.54
Somewhat agree	23	30	53	20.38
Neither agree nor disagree	20	13	33	12.69
Somewhat disagree	3	12	15	5.77
Disagree	30	41	71	27.32
Strongly disagree	9	18	27	10.38
Total	116	144	260	100

Missing value: 11 (p-value 0.00).

**Table 4.** I think the clashes among student groups are caused by their ethnic differences.

Response	QAU	IIUI	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	16	4	20	7.69
Agree	34	39	73	28.07
Somewhat agree	27	27	54	20.77
Neither agree nor disagree	17	18	35	13.46
Somewhat disagree	7	10	17	6.54
Disagree	31	12	43	16.55
Strongly disagree	11	7	18	6.92
Total	143	117	260	100

Missing value: 7 (p-value 0.05).

agree 7.69%, agree 28.07%, and somewhat agree 20.77%) that major reason for on-campus violence in Pakistan is ethnic differences/identity competition with far-right religious student groups. The state's policy for Islamic identity formation may be responsible for side-lining the Pakistani youth from the mainstream world dividends of technology and democratic rights. For example, chief justice of the Islamabad High Court ordered the government that faith identification should be made compulsory for all Pakistanis who want to apply for government jobs otherwise they are ineligible for any public employment. He further asserted, "faith should be mentioned on the birth certificates, ID cards, voters' lists, and passports. Compulsory to take an oath regarding faith when joining civil service, armed forces, or judiciary' and only Muslim teachers can teach Islamic/religious studies" (Imran, 2018). The state may support or endorse the actions of religious groups, mainly Deobandi-Salafi Muslim Sunni sects, such as the IJT, who attempt to come into clash with regional/ethnic cultural (music, poetry, dance) expression on university campus. Such confrontations often lead to intergroup fights, event destructions, and even gun firings resulting the serious injuries to students. For example, on 13 December 2019, the IJT student group clashed over the cultural event of ethnic Pashtuns, Baloch and Saraiki students in International Islamic University in which one student was killed and several injured.

The data below (see Table 5) shows the push and pull factors that can lead to the seeking membership of university student groups including ethnic and religious student councils. The data in Table 5 show that around 50% of the respondents agreed (strongly or somewhat) that students need support from student councils in a range of administrative matters, such as managing accommodation in hostel and seeking favours in class grades (as student council or group leaders have direct links with the academics and the university administrators). The data in table under analysis show that it may be necessary

**Table 5.** The support of the student council is necessary to manage hostel accommodation/room.

Response	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	16	6.02
Agree	75	28.20
Somewhat agree	66	24.81
Neither agree not disagree	49	18.42
Somewhat disagree	12	4.51
Disagree	35	13.16
Strongly disagree	13	4.89
Total	266	100

Missing value: 5 (p-value 0.13).

for students to get a membership, although apparently, it is volunteer, of student councils to obtain their support in university matters. Most of the students in the two selected universities come from outside of the twin cities (Islamabad and Rawalpindi: see [Figure 1](#)) and face difficulties in finding affordable and convenient student accommodation. These students prefer an on-campus student accommodation because that is not just convenient but also affordable. The university accommodations, however, cannot accommodate all students, and this brings competition to seek favour due to which new students seek the help of various student bodies.

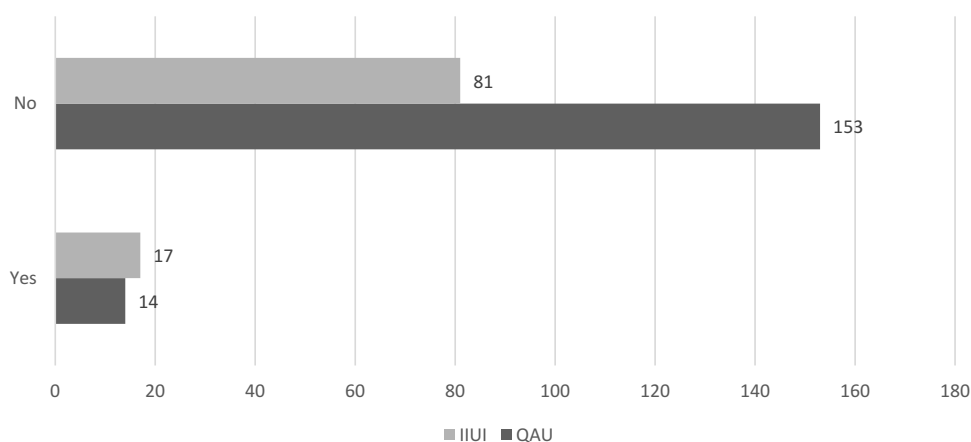
Continuing from the previous argument about the IIUI students' involvement in terrorist activities in Islamabad and other parts of the country, IIUI participants reported regular exposure to extremist material in the university premises. In contrast, QAU respondents did not face that on a regular basis. The premier intelligence agency of Pakistan warned in 2015 that IIUI is promoting sectarian extremism among students: "in specific, it has been reported that the administration and faculty of IIUI is intentionally promoting Salafi, Takfiri and Ikhwani doctrines, whereas Pakistan is fighting the demon of terrorism, incubated and abetted by the same doctrines" (Haq, 2017).

### ***Recruitment of university students by militant organizations***

In the final component of this research, we intended to see if there is any extremist recruitment happening in the two selected universities. For this purpose, we asked some indirect questions. Regarding witnessing a university friend joining an extremist organization, only 15 (10 from IIUI and 5 from QAU) participants reported to having exposure to colleagues (friends or neighbours) who had joined militant groups. When asked generally about students from your university joining extremist organizations, 31 participants said "yes" they had seen that.

The data in [Figure 4](#) indicate that students of IIUI have more exposure to the militant networks than QAU students. However, the ethnic Baluch, Sindhi, and Pashtun in QAU do not perceive regional insurgencies as part of militancy although they may have networks with insurgent groups (e.g., Baloch Liberation Army, Sindh Liberation Army) in their neighbourhoods. The term extremism and violence are relatively used in Pakistan. Every group label opponent as extremist while supporting their own group's violent activities.

[Figure 4](#) elaborates the link of university students with their fellows who have joined militant/extremist group. Most of the students from IIUI had networks within the campus who have become part of a militant group or organization. While in QAU, students join



**Figure 4.** I know some students from my university who have joined a militant/extremist group.

their ethnic student groups and take pride in their in-group membership as a homogenous lingual group and they perceive militancy only exists among religious students. They have tendencies of leftist militancy because ethnic political parties in Pakistan are pro-socialist contrary to the state's narratives of Islamic nationalism. About needs of the youth, Jones (2017) argues that Pakistani youth want youthful, liberal and modern Pakistan where they could have good employment opportunities, merit, accountability and cheap justice. In 2017 (May 17), an Islamabad-based newspaper *Daily Times* published a report on student clashes at QAU). The report found that students join the student councils from their own ethnicity and sect for group belonging and maintain networks for hostel accommodation and their university-related administrative issues, such as fee concessions and grade seeking. They may also gain access to arms, drugs, and money through the support of mainstream political parties of Pakistan. At present, six student councils at QAU are active and every council identifies with an ethnic group or region, such as Punjab, Pashtun, Mehran, Saraiki, Baloch, and Gilgit-Baltistan (Cheema, 2017).

On the other hand, Islamist political parties demand separation of sexes on public place particularly, in universities. Three decades before, the common dress at colleges and universities across Pakistan was of moderate level, i.e., very rare female students wore the burqa (veil). Now veils have become a cultural value imported from Saudi Arabia. According to (Hoodbhoy, 2009) male beards and female burqas affect behaviour of the students. The beards and burqas give the message that rest of the world is responsible for poverty, deprivation, and injustice of the Muslims. Political struggle starts from here about theocratic or modern democratic identity of Pakistan.

Table 6 indicates the exposure of university students to those groups/organizations which are mostly the first platform for youth radicalization. Among these groups are the Tablighi Jamaat and the Jamaat-e-Islami. According to the data in Table 6, around 30% of the respondents had interactions with members of the Tablighi Jamaat in their university's premises. In 2016, the government of Punjab province banned preaching on university campuses and banned the Tablighi Jamaat and other non-student religious groups from preaching and staying<sup>6</sup> in university accommodation (Dawn News, 2016). This ban

**Table 6.** How often do you meet a Tablighi Jamaat in university premises?

Response	Frequency	%
Daily	9	3.33
Once a week	20	7.41
Forthrightly	6	2.22
Once a month	42	15.56
Never	193	71.48
Total	270	100

Missing value: 5 (p-value 0.13).

might be a reaction to the international media reports revealing that the members of Tablighi Jamaat have been involved in terrorism in the West. For example, Syed Rizwan Farook “was an avid student of the teachings of Tablighi Jamaat” who was one of the perpetrators of San Bernardino attacks in California, USA (Takar & Zahid, 2016).

## Conclusion

Due to the alarming rise in violent extremism among the educated youth, particularly in South Asia, policymakers and other actors are devising new strategies to prevent youth radicalization in educational institutions as part of their countering violent extremism policy. In South Asia, such as those in Pakistan, incidents of violent extremism involving the educated youth from HEIs is increasing. While the focus of the post 9/11 CVE efforts has been on madrassas in Pakistan, recent incidents of violence and violent religious extremism in Pakistan’s universities point to the need of redirecting CVE policies towards HEIs. This research aimed to just do that by choosing current students and recent graduates of the two prominent public universities in Islamabad. There are a range of push and pull factors for students to seek membership of student groups and for engagement in violent clashes. As reported in this study, newly enrolled students seek help in administrative matters from students’ group and that is how they get involved in student politics/activism.

The student clashes, however, are both ethnically and religiously motivated. We have found that students of both the universities have been exposed to violent clashes and hate literature involving students of their universities. While ethnic differences/rivalries are viewed as the causes of regular student clashes at QAU, IIUI is more prone to religiously motivated hate speech and violence. This is mainly because of the different outlook of both universities as ethnicity-based student groups dominate QAU and IIUI has a dominance of right-wing religious groups. With regard to the recruitment of university students by extremist organizations, some participants from both universities shared having witnessed their peers joining militant organizations. Although this study focuses on university students in Pakistan, the findings may well have a bearing on students of other countries as well. The present study lays the groundwork for future research into exploring the factors of violent extremism in university students. The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, impact of school and college teachings on students’ mind including curriculum, pedagogy, and specific contents in textbooks on peace and violence. More information on these things would help us to establish a greater degree of accuracy on causes of violent extremism in young individuals in Pakistan.

## Notes

1. Living Safe Together Home. Assessed from [www.livingsafetogether.gov.au](http://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au).
2. While a variety of definitions of the term radicalization has been suggested, this paper conceptualizes radicalization as a process whereby an individual, group or community embraces a set of values and opinions about a certain group or community (based on religious, sectarian & ethnic identity) and gradually becomes more extreme and starts to deviate more from the normative opinions while at the same time rejecting the opposite opinions. This may lead to ideological violence like terrorism. This process is not one-dimensional. Several factors have an influence on this process (adapted from Sanne Geeraerts' "Digital radicalization of youth" 2012, p. 26).
3. Jamaat-ud-Dawa (Organization for Preaching) as a small missionary group dedicated to promoting an Ahl-e-Hadith version of Islam.
4. Qutb is increasingly cited as the personality who influenced al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, is known as one of the most influential advocates in modern times of jihad.
5. Nek Muhammad Wazir was a prominent Pakistani jihadi leader. He was killed in a US drone strike in South Waziristan FATA Pakistan in 2004. This was the first CIA drone strike inside Pakistan.
6. Most of the members of Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan visit university hostels for *Seh Roza* (three nights in a month) carrying sleeping bags and cooking pots on their backs. They spend nights in hostel mosques and after evening prayer they visit hostel rooms accompanied by an inside guide, mostly members of the Jamaat-e-Islami, and discuss the fundamentals of Islam with students.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Zahid Shahab Ahmed** is a research fellow at Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University, Australia.

**Qamar Abbas Jafri** is a doctoral researcher at School of Global, Urban and Social Studies RMIT University, Australia.

## ORCID

Zahid Shahab Ahmed  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2084-0253>

Qamar Abbas Jafri  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4751-3626>

## References

- Abdullah, N. A., & Saeed, M. (2016). Extremism in education in Pakistan: University teachers' thoughts. *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi*, 49(2), 55–70.
- Ahmed, A. (2019, March 21). Mashal Khan lynching case in Pakistan: Two more sentenced to life imprisonment. *Gulf News*. Retrieved from <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/mashal-khan-lynching-case-in-pakistan-two-more-sentenced-to-life-imprisonment-1.62809342>
- Ahmed, S. (2015, December 5). Who were Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/03/us/syed-farook-tashfeen-malik-mass-shooting-profile/index.html>

- Ahmed, Z. S. (2012). Political Islam, the Jamaat-E-Islami, and Pakistan's role in the Afghan-Soviet War, 1979-1988. In P. E. Muehlenbeck (Ed.), *Religion and the cold war: A global perspective* (pp. 275-298). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Ahmed, Z. S. (2017). *Peace education in Pakistan*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace.
- Ahmed, Z. S., & Balasubramanian, R. (2010). *Extremism in Pakistan and India: The case of the Jamaat-e-Islami and Shiv Sena*. Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies.
- Alavi, H. (1991). Nationhood and the nationalities in Pakistan. In H. Donnan (Ed.), *Economy and culture in Pakistan* (pp. 163-187). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Basharat, R. (2018, February 2). Students' clash at QAU leaves a dozen injured. *The Nation*. Retrieved from <https://nation.com.pk/02-Feb-2018/students-clash-at-qau-leaves-a-dozen-injured>
- Botha, A. (2014). Political socialization and terrorist radicalization among individuals who joined al-Shabaab in Kenya. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37(11), 895-919.
- British Council. (2009, May 27). *Pakistan: The next generation*. Islamabad: Author.
- Cheema, A. R. (2017). Unpacking QAU clashes. *Daily Times*. Retrieved from <https://dailytimes.com.pk/9463/unpacking-qau-clashes/>
- Dawn (2016, January 30). *Punjab campus hostels out of bounds for Tableeghi Jamaat*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1236278/punjab-campus-hostels-out-of-bounds-for-tableeghi-jamaat>
- Dawn News.(2016, June 30). *Punjab campus hostels out of bounds for Tableeghi Jamaat*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1236278/punjab-campus-hostels-out-of-bounds-for-tableeghi-jamaat>
- Geeraerts, S. B. (2012). Digital radicalization of youth. *Social Cosmos*, 3(1), 25-32.
- Githens-Mazer, J. (2009). The blowback of repression and the dynamics of North African radicalization. *International Affairs*, 85(5), 1015-1029.
- Haider, Z. (2013, April 10). The ideological struggle for Pakistan. *Hoover Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.hoover.org/research/ideological-struggle-pakistan>
- Haq, R. (2017, February 12). Campus violence rising in country. *The Express Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1324239/student-clashes-campus-violence-rising-country/>
- Hasnain, K. (2017, March 22). 10 hurt in student groups' clash at Punjab university. *Dawn*. Retrieved from [https://epaper.dawn.com/DetaillImage.php?StoryImage=22\\_03\\_2017\\_003\\_005](https://epaper.dawn.com/DetaillImage.php?StoryImage=22_03_2017_003_005)
- HECP. (Higher Education Commission Pakistan). (2017). *The role of universities in advancing national narrative to counter violence, extremism and terrorism*. Retrieved from <https://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/Pages/Joint-Declaration.aspx>
- Hoodbhoy, P. (2007). *Pakistan—The threat from within* (pp. 13). Bradford: Pakistan Security Research Unit, University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK, Brief.
- Hoodbhoy, P. (2009). The saudization of Pakistan. *Newsline*. Retrieved from <https://newsline magazine.com/magazine/the-saudi-isation-of-pakistan/>
- Imran, M. (2018, March 9). Declaration of faith compulsory before joining civil, armed services and judiciary: Islamabad high court. *Dawn News*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com>
- Jones, O. B. (2017, August 17). Faces of nationalism. *Dawn*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1352009>
- Kennedy, C. H. (2003). *Pakistan: Ethnic Diversity and Colonial Legacy. The Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflict*. London: Frank Cass.
- Khattak, K. (2016). Mapping higher education in Pakistan. *Information Technology University Punjab*. Retrieved from <http://www.technologyreview.pk/mapping-higher-education-in-pakistan/>
- McCauley, C. (2012). Testing theories of radicalization in polls of US Muslims. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 12(1), 296-311.
- Nasr, S. V. R. (1994). *The vanguard of the Islamic revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Noor, S. (2009). Radicalization among educated Pakistani youth. *Conflict and Peace Studies*, 2(1), 1-7.
- Orsini, A. (2013). Interview with a terrorist by vocation: A day among the diehard terrorists, part II. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 36(8), 672-684.
- Pisoiu, D. (2015). Subcultural theory applied to jihadi and right-wing radicalization in Germany. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27(1), 9-28.

- Rehman, S. (2018, January 22). Punjab university burns as student bodies clash. *ProPakistani*. Retrieved from <https://propakistani.pk>
- Sahoutara, N. (2019, March 1). Saad Aziz jailed for 20 years for attempting to kill American educationist. *Dawn*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1466788>
- Schmid, A. P. (2014). *Violent and non-violent extremism: Two sides of the same coin*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.
- Siddiqi, A. (2011). Red hot chilli peppers Islam–Socio-political attitudes amongst youth in elite universities in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 12, 13–25.
- Takar, N., & Zahid, N. (2016, January 15). Are conservative Muslim Tablighi Jamaat Pacifists or extremists? *East Asia Pacific*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/are-conservative-muslim-tablighi-jamaat-pacifists-or-extremists>
- Vergani, M., Iqbal, M., Ilbahar, E., & Barton, G. (2018). The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull and personal. A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–32. 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1505686
- Winthrop, R., & Graff, C. (2010). *Beyond Madrasas: Assessing the links between education and militancy in Pakistan* (pp. 2). Washington: Center for Universal Education working paper.
- Yusuf, H. (2016). University radicalization: Pakistan's next counter-terrorism challenge. *CTC Sentinel*, 9, 4–8.
- Zahid, F. (2014). The terrorist next door: Pakistan's Hammad Adil. *Militant Leadership Monitor*, 5(8), 2.
- Zahid, F. (2015). Tahir Saeen group: Higher-degree militants. *Pak Institute for Peace Studies*, 7(2), 120–131.
- Zahid, F. (2017). Radicalisation of campuses in Pakistan. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 9(11), 12–15.
- Zeiger, S., Aly, A. (2015). Countering violent extremism: Developing an evidence-base for policy and practice. Curtin University.
- Zhirkov, K., Verkuyten, M., & Weesie, J. (2014). Perceptions of world politics and support for terrorism among Muslims: Evidence from Muslim countries and Western Europe. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 31(5), 481–501.